readers' writes

Our Star letter winner hopes to send broadband costs tumbling, plenty of *PC Advisor* gamers stick up for their rights and ask what's wrong with enjoying a virtual shoot-'em-up, and one reader asks whether Rambus is worth the extra cash and hassle

Time to get off the Rambus?

I've come to the conclusion that I, along with others who find themselves owning a RDRAM (Rambus)-based PC, must be fools. Why oh why are we being made to pay far more for our RAM upgrades than those who run DDR (double data rate) RAM-based machines. And don't even mention SDRAM.

Those of us who purchased machines based on the Pentium 4 machines last summer had no option but to have Rambus, since the P4 would only support RDRAM. Is this a conspiracy? Now Intel has pulled together with motherboard manufacturers to have P4s running with DDR memory.

I understand that the gains in terms of memory performance between RDRAM and DDR RAM is negligible. So why are the prices so vastly different? I am highly irritated by this fact, and bitter that the upgradability of my PC is held to ransom where RAM is concerned. I feel let down by Intel, and now wish I had gone the DDR/Athlon route.

Are Rambus/Intel systems doomed to the white elephant graveyard? Many will say it serves me right for being eager for the latest technology, and maybe they're right, but is that a good reason for such extortionate prices? I understand Rambus is now going back up in price again. Is this true? Why?
Mark Kelly, via email

Ursula Tolaini replies: Intel spokesperson Ian Beckingham says that the initial high price of Rambus was due to supply and demand. "When we first introduced [RDRAM] it was a new product, so there was less demand and a higher price. Over the following

months prices have fallen, and now it is only slightly more expensive than DDR RAM." However, Beckingham explains, "It is still the fastest memory, and you will pay a premium for that." He also says that Intel is committed to supporting Rambus for 2002 and claims it still offers the best performance when twinned with the Pentium 4.

Stirling service in Livingston

Following your NEC supplier profile in the April issue, there are just a couple of points I would like to clarify. NEC is actually based in Livingston, Scotland and not Stirling as stated, and the correct web address for NEC Computers (UK) is www.nec-online.co.uk.
Liz Bastone, PR Consultant, Lindsay Brown Associates

Andrew Charlesworth replies: our apologies to all those readers who went to Stirling in the hope of finding NEC and were disappointed.
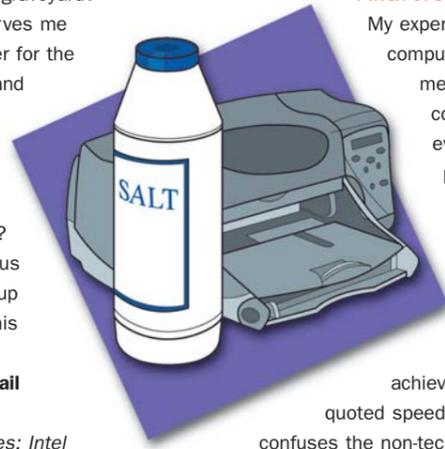
Pinch of salt

My experience with computers has brought me to one simple conclusion: take everything with a pinch of salt. Speakers are quoted with a wattage which makes them sound good on paper, printers achieve around half their quoted speeds and 'easy to use' confuses the non-technical people who actually use the product.

When will we get a truly easy-to-use product that does what it says? Don't make us buy salt with our products; it's bad enough having to buy the missing cables.
Matthew Webber, via email

It's only a game

I have to take issue with Anthony Ciantar's letter, *Xbox generation,* in the March edition. He says, "What is illegal in the real world should not be permitted in video games." Why? Would we ban Monopoly because players can go bankrupt? How about card games? Surely they encourage the most heinous gambling? And how do we deal with Risk – it is, after all, a war game analogy.

Please note the word 'game' – no one gets hurt. Extremely frustrated and annoyed, maybe, but that's about it. Nor does gaming really encourage bad language – have you heard the kind of language some five-year-olds learn in their school playgrounds?

After many years of playing I can honestly say that of all the people I've met and made friends with via gaming, none of us has yet gone out and committed murder! I would argue that anything that expands your horizons is a good thing.
Dave Stroud, via email

Geek philosophy

I think it was Aristotle who said "Violence is purged by its poetic representation on stage," and what could be better after a hard day of fighting through rush hour and the general office tedium than a few pleasant hours spent (virtually) murdering one's fellow man? It's a release from the stresses of modern working and living. I am the biggest pacifist I know, but I still enjoy a game of Counterstrike.

Perhaps what Anthony Ciantar *(Readers' writes,* March) needs is not for the rest of us to reappraise our perception of reality, but for him to seek counselling and large doses of serotonin to enable him to distinguish PC graphics from reality. I wouldn't want to play Counterstrike if it was just like the *A Team,* where millions of bullets are spent without so much as a broken toenail resulting… it just wouldn't be the catharsis that I need.

If Mr Ciantar would like to see images of human death and suffering banned, does that mean he has also written to every newspaper and news channel in the country? I'm not even going to start on movies and videos, which convey far more detail than PC games could ever do.

Furthermore, when ones plays Counterstrike, one is often very quickly reminded of the perils of running around with a gun – someone will shoot you sooner or later. What better lesson to teach than 'To live by the sword is to die by the sword'?
D Harrison and Iain Baird, via email

Upgrade to XP for less

I have built my own PC by following your workshops, and I devote a lot of time to upgrading hardware. With XP now on release, I recently found that I could purchase the operating system for a lot less than expected.

I was informed by the sales people at CCL Computers that if you purchase a hard drive, processor or motherboard then they are able to sell you the OEM (original equipment manufacturer) version of an operating system, which works out far cheaper buying a retail version. A new OEM copy of XP Home is currently £75.80, compared to over £160 from Jungle.com, for instance. A similar saving can also be had for Microsoft Office.

With the ongoing trend to put in a larger disk or faster processor, why not take the opportunity to upgrade your operating system at the same time for a lot less money? The software is the full version, just less packaging and a basic manual. I obtained Windows 2000 Pro this way and saved myself a considerable sum.
Trevor Fenn, via email

Emma Northam replies: thanks for that tip, Trevor. It's certainly a good deal if you want to increase your PC's storage capacity or whack in a new processor while upgrading your operating system. Readers should bear in mind, however, that they will have to buy a new component if they want the OEM version of XP, and the total cost may even work out more expensive than a shop-bought copy of the OS.

For instance, CCL's cheapest hard drive – a 20GB unit – is £57.44 inc VAT, and we'd imagine most people will want to upgrade to at least a 60GB hard disk which will set you back around £90. Add on the price of Windows XP Home OEM edition, and it's actually going to cost you more than a boxfresh retail version of XP from Jungle.

Quids in

I feel I must write to thank you for saving me over £100. A week ago my Epson Photo EX printer started giving bad printouts of graphics, and it looked as if one of the jets was clogged. I therefore cleaned the heads, but to no avail. I even tried binning the cartridges and installing new ones, but it made absolutely no difference to its performance.

In despair, I emailed Epson and was given the address of the company they recommend to repair their printers. However, the quoted cost of £35 ex VAT to look at it and, if the printhead needed replacing as they suspected, another £54 ex VAT to actually fix it, made me think twice. So I decided to look at a replacement printer.

But lo! Light dawned. Didn't *PC Advisor* print a troubleshooting guide for printers? Yes you did, in the January 02 edition. Upon reading it I discovered that a faulty cable can cause bad printouts. I tried a new one and joy – the printer worked perfectly. So you see, you've saved me over £100.
Paul Milne, via email ■